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ABSTRACT

College graduates face the contradictory and inconsistent beliefs of a society that seems to be struggling between a desire to either degrade or enhance the dignity of man. Amid all the current mechanical marvels there exists social ills of nightmare proportions. In the turmoil to find solutions to the many problems many have lost sight of the basic principle of serendipity at work. Seek first the basic values and all other things will come. Those basic values are courage, judgement, integrity, and dedication. The pursuit of them will help to insure their attainment, as well as help to cure the complex dilemmas facing society today. (PPB)

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CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN: GRADS URGED TO SEEK BASIC HUMAN VALUES

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A COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS FOR MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATION CLASS OF 1988 AND FOR THEIR PARENTS, RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

By Dr. James John Jelinek, Literacy Coordinator, Division of Adult Education, Arizona Department of Education, and Emeritus Professor of Education, Arizona State University.

Members of the Graduation Class of 1988. Ladies and gentlemen.

Commencement for the graduate is a time for expression of gratitude—gratitude to teachers, gratitude to family, gratitude to relatives, gratitude to friends—gratitude for sacrifices all of them have made to enrich and enhance the graduate's life, in school and out, in a multiplicity of ways.

Commencement for the graduate is also a time for reassessment of the realities before him or her, a time for the rethinking of past experiences with a view toward making life more wholesome and more meaningful in the days that lie ahead.

Of the two functions, the reassessment of realities with a view to the future is by far the most difficult.

Today the graduate is looked upon with hope, as well as exasperation. Some people look upon his attitude, his actions,

and his expectations with amusement; others almost with horror. To some he is the essence of frivolity, the acme of irresponsibility, and the representation of flouted traditions and crumbling standards; to others he is one of a generation of individuals like previous generations, with all the characteristics merely repeated. To some he is the source of statistics on unlawfulness; to others he is the single great statistic by which human hope can be measured. To some he is the advocate of the troublesome and often cynical sport of making a mockery of all they have accepted as desirable and proper. To others he is the eternal and essential champion of challenge. To some his blunders are inexcusable. To others they are inevitable. The one thing certain is that nothing graduates do these days goes unnoticed or unmentioned by the people around him.

Be that as it may, the graduate today faces a world of reality beset with confusions, contradictions, and problems.

He is thrust into a society that says, on the one hand, that honesty is the best policy, but on the other hand says that business is business and a businessman would be a fool not to cover his hand.

He is told, on the one hand, that democracy is the ultimate form for all of us to live by, but on the other hand he is told

he would never get anywhere nowadays if he followed the slow, tedious processes of democratic action.

He is taught, on the one hand, that women are to be respected as the finest of God's creatures, but on the other hand he is told that women are certainly not very practical and are beyond a doubt inferior to men in reasoning power and general ability.

He learns, on the one hand, that the American judicial system issues justice to everyone, rich or poor, but on the other hand he is led to believe a person is a fool not to hire the best lawyer he can afford.

He is urged, on the one hand, to believe that religion and the finer things of life are our ultimate values, but on the other hand he is urged to believe he is rich only in terms of the material things he can own, use, and consume.

He is told, on the one hand, that hard work and thrift are signs of character and the way to get ahead, but on the other hand he is told shrewd people get ahead nowadays not by working hard, but rather by knowing the right people and by looking and acting like big money.

These are but a few of the basic confusions and contradictions in beliefs that plague us day by day as a

people. They are symptomatic of the fundamental issues those of previous generations have not resolved. They are indeed indicators of the perplexing ambivalences that challenge a graduate as he stands at the threshold of a new phase of his life.

In essence, the question before us today is simple: How have we as a people come to hold these contradictory and inconsistent beliefs and, even more importantly, what can we say in times like these to help our graduates, and ourselves, to develop a consistent, noncontradictory, and mutually adjusted culture and outlook that will enhance rather than degrade the dignity of man?

To begin with, in his reassessment of the realities of our times, the graduate must recognize that man has his mechanical foot in a space craft and his social foot in an oxcart. While we live in a world characterized by gadgets that are the marvel of history, we likewise live in a world beset with social problems the horror of which man has never experienced in all his existence. Things, not ideas, are in the saddle and ride mankind.

Sociologist Robert S. Lynd points out, for example, that new tools and mechanical inventions have brought about more

change in our culture than have the techniques of business and management.

Automobiles have had greater impact on the leisure-time activities of the young than have all the pronounciamentoes of their parents and teachers.

Tin cans have been more instrumental in the liberation of women than have been the pontifical manifestos of statesmen and divines.

Thus it has always been in principle, that social life has been compelled to adjust itself to changes in material things.

One wonders where it will all lead. Today we make gadgets that move man through space faster than 17,000 miles per hour, many times faster than the human voice travels from one person to another.

Computers, with their phenomenal capacity to store and analyze data, have revolutionized ways of doing things in factories, offices, hospitals, libraries, homes, and business centers. These computers now analyze cases for lawyers; they diagnose patients for doctors; and they teach children for teachers. With 2,000 pages of books and newspapers and reports being published every sixty seconds, day and night throughout the world, libraries must now use microfilm to record and computers to locate documents and references.

The home is being completely transformed. Houses are being built entirely of plastic with one-piece kitchens and bathrooms prefabricated at the factory, with windows having built-in heating and cooling units, with self-propelled servers and dishwashers that go from patio or dining room to kitchen at the press of a button, with automatic dishmakers by means of which a housewife can make her own disposable dishes so that she can throw them away after every meal instead of washing them.

Chemists, physicists, physical biologists, and theoretical mathematicians are joining forces in new assaults on the mysteries of the human organism and the prevention and control of diseases. Engineers now work in the areas of magneto hydro dynamics, lasers, masers, integrated circuits, molecular biology, plasma physics, fuel cells, radio astronomy, and thermionics, fields of work they did not study in school because these fields did not even exist when they went to school.

But amid all these physical marvels of our time there exist social problems of nightmare proportions. Problems of race, religion, sex, economics, and politics tear our hearts asunder.

As far back as 1948, General Omar Nelson Bradley, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of America's armed

forces, informed us that "with the monstrous weapons man already has, humanity is in danger of being trapped in this world by its moral adolescence. Our knowledge of science," he said, "has clearly outstripped our capacity to control it. We have too many men of science; too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Man is stumbling blindly through a spiritual darkness while toying with the precarious secrets of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear grants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. This is our twentieth century's claim to distinction and progress."

The consequences of our inability to resolve our contradictory beliefs and practices and to solve our basic and foundational problems can most effectively be portrayed by way of the most shocking figures you will probably ever hear!

There are 7,000 babies born in the United States every 24 hours. Of these 7,000 babies, 1 of every 17 will be in a hospital for the mentally ill before his life is over.

There are more people in the institutions for the mentally ill than there are students in all our colleges and universities put

together. There are more persons in beds for the mentally ill than for all other hospital beds combined.

The American Medical Association reports that 1 of every 13 men reporting for induction in the armed services is rejected as mentally unfit.

It has been estimated that out of a group of 25 children, 1 of the group will be in a hospital for the mentally ill before his or her life is finished; 4 more will be profoundly neurotic; and approximately 8 to 10 will be fairly normal.

Man does indeed have his mechanical foot in a space craft and his social foot in an oxcart.

Now the ways and means we have used to solve the social and cultural problems that characterize our times have been as fascinating and as pathetic as they have been varied.

More discipline, more authority, more science, more security, more rigor, more phonics, more homework, more standards, more competition, more content, more this, more that, more something else.

What we have done and what we are doing now is to flit from one isolated particular to another, always with the fervent

but vain hope that this or that particular would spell our salvation.

That approach belies the best we know in the areas of psychology, philosophy, education and religion. It belies what is in point of fact one of the most basic principles of human affairs.

This principle is the principle of serendipity—ser-en-di-pi-ty. You will understand it better by derivation than by definition.

History tells us about the three Persian princes from the city of Serendip. As their Royal Highnesses traveled about the world they learned that by pursuing basic values they were always discovering and gaining other things that made their lives richer, fuller, and happier. But when they lost or forgot the basic values and sought the petty, isolated, incidental particular things around them, they discovered and gained nothing.

So it is now; so it has always been with Man.

When Christ in his sermon on the mount spoke to the multitudes about propagating the wisdom of which he spoke the people reacted in the same way many of us are reacting to our problems today—to the isolated particulars. If, said

the people, we are to work for the propagation of the faith, how will we clothe our bodies, how will we feed our hungry mouths, how will we learn to speak with eloquence, how will we learn to write with persuasion, how will we care for our children, how will we build our cities, how will we . . ., how will we . . ., how will we . . .? In all his pontifical wisdom Christ responded to them by saying in effect, Seek ye first the basic value and all these things shall come to pass.

Here then is the principle of serendipity at work: Seek you first the basic value and all these other things shall come to pass.

All of us need basic values. All the mundane every day pursuits about us are meaningless unless they relate somehow to the enhancement of those values.

To pursue the panaceas, the isolated particulars, for their own sake is folly, be they happiness, security, standards, prestige, discipline, or whatever. Seek ye first the basic value and all these things shall come to pass.

In other words, he who seeks happiness has already lost it, but he who seeks a basic value discovers happiness when he least expects it. This is the principle of serendipity at work—to seek a basic goal or value and, in so doing, to discover and to receive hitherto unknown and unexpected blessings.

Ladies and gentlemen, history will not judge the endeavors of these graduates only on the basis of their competence or loyalty or stature or any other isolated particular. While essential to the utmost, these will not suffice in times like these, for of those to whom much is given, much is required.

When at some future time the high court of history sits in judgment on each of these graduates—recording whether in their brief span they fulfilled their responsibilities to you, to their country, and to themselves, their successes and their failures will be measured in terms of basic human values, perhaps such values as the following:

First, were they truly men and women of courage—with courage to stand up to their enemies, with courage to stand up to their own associates, with courage to resist public pressure and private greed?

Second, were they truly men and women of judgment—with perceptive judgment of the future as well as the past, of their own mistakes as well as the mistakes of others, with enough wisdom to know what they did not know and enough candor to admit it?

Third, were they truly men and women of integrity—men and women who never ran out on either the principles in which

they believed or the people who believed in them, men and women whom neither financial gain nor social ambition could ever divert from the fulfillment of their sacred trust?

And, fourth, were they truly men and women of dedication—with an honor mortgaged to no single individual or group and compromised by no private obligation or aim, but devoted to serving the public good?

Courage • Judgment • Integrity • Dedication

These are among the basic values, the pursuit of which may by way of the principle of serendipity, help our graduates to eliminate the heart-rending frustrations that characterize their generation and to resolve the baffling contradictions and inconsistencies that plague their times.

And so with these words, we who are friends and relatives, dedicated teachers and administrators, all of us, offer to these graduates of 1988 our very best wishes.

By way of the educational experiences they have had in their schooling, these graduates have learned that discipline is not a matter of getting someone to do what he does not want to do. It is rather a matter of pursuing a goal, a value, even in the face of difficulty, of hardship, of handicap, of distraction

or of hindrance. In this terms and in the framework of a contemporary ballad we say to them in all humility:

Climb every mountain,
Search high and low,
Follow every byway,
Every path you know.
Climb every mountain,
Ford every stream,
Follow every rainbow,
'Till you find your dream:
A dream that will need
All the love you can give,
Every day of your life
For as long as you live.
Climb every mountain,
Ford every stream,
Follow every rainbow
'Till you fulfill your dream.